

servant, he could never pay it off, but the King has the strength of will and compassion to dissolve that debt. The debt is not postponed but gone for ever. Jesus is making it clear, real forgiveness costs, and real forgiveness is not easy. If we want an example of such costly debt-dissolving loving forgiveness we only have to look to the Cross where the King of kings paid on the nail the debt we all have with God. Real forgiveness needs a strength of will and compassion. We see that strength in Jesus, who was even able from the cross to forgive those who were putting him to death. Forgiveness is not easy for us, because of our own, very human imperfections, unlike Jesus we struggle with pride and sometimes even the need for vengeance. As Christians when forgiveness feels impossible the only place we can find the strength of will and compassion to forgive is by asking Jesus for his help through his Spirit. Once we begin to pray for those who have hurt us eventually we may find the depth of love to tear up the debt of love they owe us.

The end of Jesus' story shows a sad and tragic end when forgiveness is overwhelmed by a desire for vengeance. The servant who has had his debt cancelled shows that the experience had not strengthened his humanity, for rather than forgive the paltry debt of his fellow servant he cannot see a human with a debt of love but rather a target for his vengeance. Forgiveness is about honouring the truth of the divine image in each other; our true humanity but if we cannot see that divine image then we will struggle to forgive.

A willingness to forgive is the mark of a human being touched by God; not defensive about their identity, but free to reach out to another human being made in God's image. The amazing truth is that when we are able to forgive not only is the one forgiven restored in love; so is the one who has offered forgiveness.

STODDEN SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER : "Live" and "ZOOM" services

20 th	Trinity 15	9.00am Pertenhall	10.30am	ZOOM
27 th	Trinity 16	9.00am Shelton	10.30am	ZOOM

4th October Harvest

9.00am Melchbourne "live" said service, music but no hymns

10.30am Harvest Praise with Hymns ZOOM

ACCESS TO CHURCHES if anyone would like to enter one of the church buildings for prayer at the moment the best thing to ask them to contact me

DO MAKE USE OF OUR WEBSITE Our website is THE STODDEN CHURCHES. There you will find service information. It is somewhere you can suggest people look for information who are new to the area.

The Stodden Churches

Prayers and Readings for the week beginning Sunday 13th September 2020 – The 14th after Trinity

Our Vision Statement: As the Stodden Churches we seek to move forward together in love and service, sharing the good news of Christ with our neighbours

From the Stodden Villages lease remember in your prayers : Teresa Allan, Pauline McManus, Steve Lemming, Ruth Krisans, Frances Bratcher, Andy Langley, Andrew Seabrook, Rosemary Morgan, Anne Hauxwell, Michelle & Vienna Hayers, John Braga, Geoff Crow. *If someone would like a visit or a prayer tell Stephen the Rector (709740)*

VIRTUAL COLLECTION PLATE: If you wish to be able to give electronically here are the Stodden Churches bank detail: Stodden account number 10842168 sort code 20-74-81

This week's Psalm: 114: When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion.

The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back.

The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.

Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back?

O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs?

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.

The 1st Reading: Romans 14:1-12: Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall.

and they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.⁵ Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.⁷ We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.¹⁰ Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. ¹¹For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'¹² So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

The 2nd Reading: ; Matthew 18:21-35: ²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' ²² Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.²³ 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." ²⁹Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

A Reflection on Forgiveness: Today I would like to spend some time reflecting on forgiveness: it is seen as one of the key Christian virtues but it is the most difficult because it is about loving those who have hurt us, or loving those whom we have hurt in either anger or selfishness.

Conversation about forgiveness is not exclusive to Christians it is a virtue that society as whole values; whenever a mass murder happens, or a terrorist act takes place, there is a lot talk about forgiveness; whether it can be offered, or whether it should be. When-ever past conflicts are remembered there is talk about forgiveness.

We see that recognition that forgiveness is complex and tough in Peter's question to Jesus in our reading from Matthew. Peter asks; "*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?*" Peter thinks he is being generous because Rabbis at the time said 2 or 3 times was reasonable to forgive someone, but anything beyond would be an unreasonable expectation. Peter knows that forgiveness is not easy.

Jesus' reply was a surprise: Jesus sets no limit to forgiveness. When Jesus says that forgiveness should be offered not 7 but 77 times he means times without number. Saying that there should be no limit to how often and how much we forgive is a really hard saying: but that is the standard that Jesus sets out for his followers.

So why is forgiveness not easy? It is hard enough forgiving someone once, let alone seven. It is because forgiveness costs; there is no such thing as cheap forgiveness because at the heart of forgiveness in action is self-giving, self "setting aside", love. Such love is costly because meeting the debt of love that is at the heart of the need for forgiveness is hard. For Jesus it took him to the Cross; love divine is all about settling the debt of love that brings us God's forgiveness. Jesus' story about the King and the servant who owed him ten thousand talents makes the point that forgiveness in action is all about cancelling debt. We are challenged to forgive when someone is in debt of love to us: that debt does not have to be financial, although it could be if money was stolen or lost. The debt of love is usually to do with relationship: and the debt is created when that relationship is damaged by lying, betrayal, insult or abuse. The debt of love that challenges our ability to forgive is not measured in terms of pound signs but in terms of inner hurt. Forgiveness is not easy because the cancellation of debt means the cancellation of all that pain: but for forgiveness to be real that debt needs to be torn up. In Jesus' story about the King and the Servant who owed him ten thousand talents we see that when the servant begs on his knees for time to pay, the King writes off the debt. That moment in the story is how Jesus sees forgiveness working. The size of the debt torn up by the King is important: the servant owed ten thousand talents which is the equivalent of a billion pounds today. The debt is massive, unredeemable by the

